



Congressman Tom Tancredo
Representing Colorado's Sixth District

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Remarks by Representative Tom Tancredo
Miami Rotary Club
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Thank you for the kind introduction. Your own congressional representative, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, wanted to be here and was the first Miami resident to invite me to visit. I would love to have her visit Colorado, but first she has to do or say something controversial.

If, for example, she would propose new federal legislation that prohibits Californians from emigrating to Colorado, she would be very popular in Colorado. Probably Denver Rotary or Kiwanis would invite her to speak.

I appreciate the invitation and the opportunity to speak to Miami Rotarians today. I am very familiar with the traditions of this organization and the numerous civic contributions of Rotary International.

I think it is fair to say that I was invited here because of my recent reported remarks calling Miami a "Third World country." The remark did receive a lot of publicity, and I have now become pen pals with Miami-Dade Mayor Alvarez and Governor Bush, among other Florida residents.

Seriously, I do appreciate the opportunity to visit Miami again and to explain why I said what I said and what I meant by it. I hope that after hearing my views more fully, you will agree that the issues of cultural assimilation and bilingualism deserve a more serious public debate than they have received to date.

Miami is certainly a unique place in some respects. Since 1960, our nation has welcomed the refugees from Castro's communist dictatorship, and Miami has been a natural destination for untold thousands of those refugees since then.

But Miami is unique in a deeper sense as well. Most of the first generation Cubans who fled Castro's tyranny and settled in Miami thought of themselves not as immigrants but as exiles. They maintained their identity and their language and community because they intended to return to Cuba someday. Thus, since 1960 Miami has been both a new home and an exile community, and Americans accommodated to it.

I have three concerns about the evolution of this Miami experiment over the past half-century, the magnet it has become for illegal immigration, and the dangers that multiculturalism poses for our future as a nation.

My first concern is that we must understand the limits of American generosity and the need to enforce those limits through immigration laws and secure borders. We cannot simply open the doors to everyone who wants to come to America, because without limit and without a viable system of assimilation, America will cease to be America.

Without secure borders, America will come to mirror the problems of poverty and corruption that afflict so much of the world from which people wish to escape.

America has welcomed the refugees from the communist tyranny in Cuba, just as it welcomed refugees from the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and from the communist take over in Vietnam and Laos. Those are POLITICAL refugees, people fleeing out of fear for their lives and for religious freedom.

But America cannot be a sanctuary for the literally billions of people who may wish to flee poverty or simply want a better life than can be found in other nations. America cannot even be asked to open its doors to EVERY person in the world fleeing political persecution....After all, there are more than a billion people in China alone living under the yoke of totalitarianism, not to mention North Korea and Iran.

If America was to open its doors to every person seeking a better job or a more favorable business climate or a better political system, literally billions of people will come – and we cannot accommodate them all. Humanitarian values must be tempered by prudence.

My concern here is that because of the generous treatment of Cuban exiles and refugees, Florida and Miami have become magnets for illegal aliens fleeing dozens of countries for purely economic reasons. Thousands also come to engage in criminal activities, and Florida taxpayers in 2004 were hit with a bill of over \$120 million for the cost of incarcerating illegal alien criminals. The total taxpayer cost of social services provided to illegal immigrants in Florida in 2005—in public schools, hospital emergency rooms, and law enforcement-- was estimated at over one billion dollars.

The high crime rate in Miami is a major factor driving native-born residents out of the city.

- In 2003, violent crimes in Miami were 3.14 times the national rate and triple the rate of some larger cities like Denver.
- The murder rate in 2003 was 2.53 times the national rate and double the rate of another large city in the region, Charlotte-Mecklenburg.
- In 1999, 26% of all youth arrested aged 15 to 26 in Miami tested positive for

cocaine.

- Greater Miami's cocaine-based emergency room admissions are three times the national average.
- The good news is Miami no longer has the highest crime rate in the US—it is improved to be only #3. Perhaps the mayor will declare a holiday.
- Last month the Palm Beach Post reported that the U.S. Justice Department calls South Florida the "public corruption capital of the nation," outranking New York City, Detroit, and Los Angeles. In the ten year period 1996-2005, 576 individuals were prosecuted on public corruption charges in South Florida.

Yes, I know, there has always been some corruption in every large city and in many small towns as well. The difference is this. In a Third World country, corruption is a way of life, it is accepted, it is routine way of doing business. Mexico has its "mordida" and Russia has a violent mafia and so forth. In America by contrast, it is a scandal and someone is thrown out of office. So, I ask you: Is corruption becoming a way of life in Miami?

Undoubtedly, many of Miami's problems are derived from its high poverty rate. The 2002 Census found Miami to have the highest poverty rate in the US for cities of its size—31%. For all of Miami-Dade it is 18%. That ranking has improved modestly, but Miami is now attracting more low-wage immigrants than high-tech workers, so what is the trend line? The illegal immigrants of today are not the doctors and lawyers and engineers of the Cuban exodus of the 1960s, and our open borders are in fact "importing poverty" as a national policy.

Forbes magazine reports in a recent edition that since 2002, a net of 151,000 Miami residents, most of them middle-class, have left Miami for other parts of the country, and 238,000 new Miami residents have arrived from other nations, mostly Central and South America. Miami-Dade County now has a foreign-born population of 51.4%, the highest in the country for a large city.

The Inter-American Development Bank reports on remittances sent home by immigrants working in the US. In 2004, 47% of Florida's adult immigrant population sent \$2.45 billion to relatives and friends in Latin America. Remittances have been increasing at more than 10% annually, so by 2006 almost three billion dollars in earnings are leaving Florida and do not contribute to the Florida economy. Thus, if Miami-Dade has 20% of the state's immigrants, Miami's economy is exporting about \$600 million annually through remittances.

My second concern is for our nation's security with open borders and a broken immigration system. We must recognize we live in a different world than the 1960s. And we must adjust our approach to immigration accordingly. In public policy, many times the appropriate solution to a problem in one era is the cause of problems in another.

Today we have real enemies in the world of Islamo-fascism, enemies who are actively planning acts of terror against our cities and our monuments and our people. The FBI says Hezbollah is active in Mexico, and we know that networks used to smuggle drugs and Guatemalan workers can also be used to smuggle terrorists and weapons of mass destruction. We cannot continue our lackadaisical approach to border security in this environment.

My third concern is actually my main worry, and it goes beyond numbers or threats to our national security. When millions of people are coming to the United States each year – many of them from the same geographic area and without any desire to become Americans– how do we preserve and perpetuate the “American identity”?

By the American identity I mean those qualities that make us Americans, make our country the envy of the world and the beacon of hope for freedom loving people everywhere. If we lose those qualities, if we start to look like and act like the rest of the world, where will the next generation of political refugees seek asylum?

Throughout history, America has absorbed waves of immigration and preserved a shared national identity by assimilating newcomers into the great “melting pot.” But many Americans have begun to wonder whether or not the “melting pot” is still melting – or if it has been replaced by a “salad bowl.”

Indeed, your current mayor was for many years an active member and advocate for the “SALAD” organization—the Spanish American League Against Discrimination. His first job out of college was serving as that group’s paid executive director. That organization has explicitly rejected the melting pot in favor of the “salad.” In a salad, each ingredient retains its unique flavor instead of blending into the melting pot.

The “melting pot” has taken on all comers since the 19th century – and the melting pot has always won. But the current scope, duration, and wave of immigration (both legal and illegal) presents a challenge for the melting pot like none ever seen before.

In the first place, never before has America taken on such a disproportionate amount of immigrants from one geographic part of the world. Nearly half of our legal immigration and about 90% of our illegal immigration is from Central and South America and is Spanish speaking.

This is an important fact because a common language is one of the few ties that bind Americans of vastly different races, religions, creeds, educational and economic backgrounds together. Advocates of multiculturalism truly do not understand that a common language is the cement that holds these different parts together.

I need to explain this briefly, because my views on bilingualism have been the target for much demagoguery by the political correctness police who like to throw around such

words as "racist" and "bigot" quite liberally.

The debate over bilingualism has nothing whatever to do with race, but it does have something to do with our ability to converse in the public square and reason together about the future of our communities—the future of our schools, our libraries, our hospitals, our jobs, the direction of technology, and yes, our borders and our national security.

If you want to see a nation that has a 200-year experience with bilingualism and its consequences, look at our neighbor to the north, Canada. I do not think we want to follow that path and experience those consequences. I think we want to remain a nation where citizens in Miami can talk with citizens in Denver or Duluth, Atlanta or Austin – where all citizens can debate the great issues of our time because we all speak the same language.

Before we can begin to articulate any notion of “shared values,” we must first have a shared language.

Bilingualism is an asset to an individual, and people who can speak two or three languages have an advantage in commerce and travel and trade – but it is a great curse when imposed on a whole society.

About ten years ago, the *Miami Herald* launched a Spanish language newspaper – *EL NUEVO HERALD*-- in recognition of the fact that 30% of the 2.1 million residents of Miami-Dade County either spoke only Spanish or mainly Spanish in their homes.

What made the Herald's decision unusual was that it was not launching a new paper or magazine to augment its daily newspaper. It was launching a SUBSTITUTE newspaper, an alternative newspaper that would compete with itself. Pardon me, but I think it is a good thing if all the citizens of a community can read the same newspaper. Is it really a good idea to tell citizens they do not need to learn English to be a full member of the community?

Twenty-five years ago, the mayor of Miami, Maurice Ferre, predicted that in ten years Spanish would become the dominant language of Miami and suggested that residents who did not want to learn Spanish should leave. Such statements by public officials do not encourage new immigrants from New York, Michigan or Japan or Germany. In fact, they suggest that the only immigrants Miami wants are Spanish-speaking immigrants from Latin America, and Miami's "sanctuary city" policy tells illegal immigrants they will be treated as equals to legal immigrants.

The eminent Stanford University sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset put it this way:

“The histories of bilingual and bicultural societies that do not assimilate are histories of turmoil, tension, and tragedy.”

He is right, and America is fast approaching the crossroads where we must choose greater assimilation – or greater fragmentation.

If we do not choose assimilation, and pursue aggressive policies to accomplish it, we will continue to see increasing alienation and fragmentation.

Assimilation must once again become a cornerstone of our national immigration policy. We must encourage, nourish, and support institutions that promote assimilation, and a key pillar of successful assimilation is becoming proficient in the English language.

Theodore Roosevelt understood the need for the assimilation of the “melting pot.” And Teddy knew something about immigration – he served as both Governor of New York and President of the United States during one of America’s largest and most famous waves of immigration.

“Let us say to the immigrant NOT that we hope he will learn English, but that he has GOT to learn it. Let the immigrant who will not learn it go back. He must be made to consider the interest of these United States or he should not stay here. He must be made to see that his opportunities in this country depend on it. He must be made to see that his opportunities in this country depend on knowing English and observing American standards. And employers cannot be permitted to regard him as only industrial asset.”

Roosevelt went on to say, *“The effort to keep our citizenship divided against itself by the use of the hyphen along the lines of national origin is certain to breed a spirit of bitterness and prejudice and dislike between great bodies of our citizens.”*

So, when I look out on this audience, I do not see “Cuban-Americans” or Puerto Rican-Americans or Mexican-Americans, I see only Americans, just as when I spoke at a dinner commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution, I did not see “Hungarian-Americans,” I saw only Americans.

Previous generations of immigrants had to come a long way to get to the United States. The option of returning home for something like a family gathering wasn’t an option. They had to completely embrace America and the notion of becoming an American.

Most of today’s immigrants take a much shorter trip to get here, and live close enough to their country of origin that they can go home for the weekend. Some even maintain dual citizenship and vote in American elections as well as the election in their home country. This phenomenon has become so commonplace that the President of Mexico recently campaigned in U.S. cities in the lead up to the Mexican election.

The pressure to assimilate that Roosevelt recognized as so critical at the turn of the twentieth century has nearly disappeared in some cities here in the twenty-first.

If we do not demand that immigrants get into the great melting pot – if immigrants are permitted to continue to form their own independent cultural, political and linguistic

enclaves – if we fail to instill in new arrivals the language, culture, and values that bind America together as a nation, we will soon cease to have a nation. At best, we will be little more than an economy. And at worst, the “melting pot” will have been replaced with a “pressure cooker.”

- So, when I read in a TIME magazine from 1994 that a local professor in Miami thinks it is a badge of honor that in Miami, "*there is no pressure to become American*," I worry about that.
- I worry when I read an interview with the very influential founder of the Cuban American National Foundation, Jorge Mas Canosa, who told the Miami Herald in 1992: "*I have never assimilated. I never intend to. I am a Cuban first. I live here only as an extension of Cuba.*" I think it is fair to say that Canosa was speaking for many in his generation of exiles, and I worry whether that attitude is still widespread.
- When I read that in Miami, most business and commerce is conducted in Spanish, I worry about that.
- When I read that some years ago the Miami-Dade school district made bilingualism *mandatory-- all students must learn Spanish unless a parent signs a waiver--* I worry about that. Students and parents should decide what foreign languages students learn, not the school board.
- When I read that in a recent random poll of Miami residents, when asked to name the number one value in Miami, the value that makes Miami unique, the number one answer was "corruption"--- yes, I worry about that.
- I am concerned when the political leaders of Miami cannot discuss the crime rate without using evasive language like "The crime rate is down." Down from number one in the nation to number three or number five?

Governor Bush sent me a letter in which he bragged about the high number of Advance Placement students graduating from one of Miami's high schools. I do not doubt those numbers. But his letter did not take note of the 55% dropout rate for the Miami-Dade School District.

I challenge you to ask the schools to break that number down and find out the true dropout rate for students who are not proficient in English. I assure you it will be higher than the 55% average for all students.

My friends, I recognize that bilingualism in Miami has its roots in the Cuban exile community and that there are historical and political reasons why those Cubans originally wanted to maintain their identity and their culture. But friends, *amigos*, this is 2006 and three generations of Cuban immigrants have become Americans.

Even if Castro dies tomorrow and his brother Raul transforms himself into a Cuban Gorbachev and institutes economic and political reforms, the large majority of Americans of Cuban extraction will not go back to Cuba. They may invest there, may visit or vacation there, but they will remain Americans because they have made America their home.

I think it is clear that their future is in America, not in Cuba, and in America, we speak English. We also speak Italian, German, Chinese, Vietnamese, Hmong, Farsi, Bantu, Spanish and a hundred other languages, but English is our language of commerce, our language of education, our language of professional sports, and most important of all, it is our language of political debate and active citizenship. *It is the language of the American nation.*

25 years ago, the Puerto-Rican born Mayor of Miami Maurice Ferre predicted that "*Cubans will eventually have to decide to either become Americans or remain an exile community.*" He was right, and it is a mistake to think that bilingualism allows a kind of dual loyalty or dual citizenship. It does not. That is an illusion. Bilingualism promotes disunity, ethnic resentments and balkanization, and nowhere on earth has that been a healthy or successful thing.

I do not think most citizens of Miami want it to be mistaken for a Third World Country, especially if that term is interpreted to mean a city rife with poverty, crime and corruption. Yet the dominance of Spanish as the language of commerce, of entertainment, and increasingly the language of the civic culture creates the impression that you have some ambivalence about America and its institutions.

A city populated by tens of thousands of newly arriving immigrants needs to put ADDITIONAL value on learning English, not less, so that new citizens can more fully engage and interact with fellow Americans not just in Miami, but across this great nation.

Like the immigrants of the 19th century and the 20th century, immigrants today must also choose, and when they choose to become an American-- no longer an exile or a guest worker or a visiting sports superstar, but an American citizen -- they must also choose to speak the language of America, not the language of the nations from which they fled. English is the language of American democracy, and for that reason we should embrace it and use it to serve and protect our precious heritage of freedom.